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SPEECH

OF

MR. ROBBINS,

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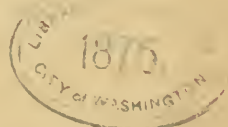
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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES, FEBRUARY 19, 1837



WASHINGTON:

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1837.

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SPEECH.

I consider this work of Mr. Madison, now proposed to be given to the world under the patronage of this Government, as the most valuable one to mankind that has appeared since the days when Bacon gave to the world his *Novum Organon*. That produced that revolution in analytics, which has produced the immense superiority of the moderns over the ancients in the knowledge of Nature, and in the improvement of the condition of human life—the fruit of that knowledge. With Bacon it was a mere theory; a theory, however, which he fondly cherished, and confidently believed would be prolific, as it has been, of the most magnificent results; but in the hands of Newton, and of his other disciples and followers, it became a practical guide to those astonishing discoveries which, in their consequences, have, among other things, converted those elements of Nature before supposed to be, only to be controlled by the same Almighty hand which formed them, into the ministers and agents of man, obedient to his will, and subservient to his use. It has enabled man to draw the veil from the face of Nature; to inspect her mechanism; and to avail himself of her principles for the augmentation of his own power. It has given him power after power; and is still going on to give him power upon power, as his researches go on in exploring her boundless fields, and in making discovery upon discovery; and to this growing increase of human power, no human being can now assign the possible limits. True, it has not enabled man, as it was fabled of him by the poets of old, to steal the fire from the heavens; but it has enabled him to do

more and better—it has enabled him to become an humble pupil in the school of the Divine Artist; and, by studying his models, to copy his agencies, though at the immeasurable distance which separates a finite from the Infinite Being.

As this Organon of Bacon has been the beacon-light to mankind to guide him to the true philosophy, and to the improvement of his physical condition, so will this work of Madison, as I trust and predict, be his beacon-light to guide him to the true science of free government, and to the improvement of his political condition. The science of free government; the most difficult of all the sciences, by far the most difficult, while it is the most important to mankind; of all the slowest in growth, the latest in maturity. Not the science which has penetrated the causes and explained to mankind the phenomena of the heavens is so difficult; that has been found of easier and more rapid attainment. Indeed, the difficulties to be overcome in evolving this science are so great, that we are to wonder less at its tardy advances, than at its final success. In the first place, it requires the deepest and most perfect insight into the nature of man: of man not only in his general nature, but as modified by society; which every where has superinduced and clothed him with a second nature denominated *habit*; and that as diversified as the countries he inhabits. Then it requires that faculty of comprehensive combination, which is the rarest of all the gifts of God to man, and which, whenever and wherever it appears, seems destined to produce an era in human affairs; a faculty of combining into a whole, where the elements to be combined are so various as to be almost infinite; a whole perfect in relation to all its parts, and its parts perfect in relation to the whole. Besides, the perfect model of the free Government is not like the perfect model of any other science. Of every other science, the perfect model any where is the perfect model every where, and every where alike perfect. The perfect watch at Washington, for instance, is the perfect watch at Canton, and so all over the globe; but not so the perfect model of the free Gov-

ernment: that, though the principles are the same every where, the form varies as the circumstances vary, of the people by whom it is established; to which circumstances it must always be adjusted and made to conform.

Here, with us, the difficulties to be overcome in this achievement, from the nature of the elements to be combined, were stupendously great. In looking back to those difficulties, that they were overcome at all, appears to me now little less than a prodigy; and it still fills me with astonishment. For here a combination was required that would produce a structure, perfectly anomalous in the history of human Governments; and such a structure was produced, and as perfect as it was novel. Here were a people, spread and spreading over a vast territory—that stretching and to stretch almost from the rising to the setting sun—this scattered and countless multitude were to be ruled in freedom as one people, and by the popular will—that will to be uncontrolled in itself, and controlling every thing. Such an achievement, the most enlightened friends of freedom and human rights, in all countries, and in all ages, had deemed to be morally and physically impossible. Besides, here were thirteen States, and all the other States to be formed out of that vast territory, without being destroyed as States, to be so combined as to form, in the general aspect, but one simple Government; with all the unity and energy of one simple Government; powerful alike to assert and maintain all their rights as a nation, against all other nations; and the rights of every individual, all over this boundless domain, against every aggressor; that is, a Government equally fitted and efficient for all the purposes of peace and war. Such an achievement, often before, and under much more favorable circumstances, because upon a much more limited scale, had been attempted, but never before accomplished; as is but too well attested by the histories and the destinies of all the confederacies that before had ever existed on the earth.

Those confederacies had all proved signal failures as effective Governments, both in war and peace; and on

tirely for the want of that form of structure and principle of combination that would reconcile absolute sovereignty in the nation with sovereignty in the States, as parts of one nation—as consistent and harmonious parts of one supreme sovereignty. This principle, unexplored and unknown before, was developed and displayed, most happily so, in the structure of our confederate and national Republic.

This work now proposed to be published will unfold to us all the steps of that diversified analysis and discovery which lead to this happy and splendid result.

Those who think (if any think) that the result itself—namely, the Constitution—of itself and by itself, will be enough for the instruction of mankind on this subject, are much mistaken. For there is a vast difference between the knowledge which is acquired analytically, and that which is acquired synthetically; the latter is but isolated knowledge; the former is knowledge that is the consequence of other knowledge. Synthesis gives to us a general truth, but acquired in a mode that is barren of other fruit; analysis not only gives to us the same general truth, but puts us on the track of invention and discovery, and is always fertile of other, and often of better fruit: synthesis carries us to a fountain head, but never beyond; but analysis carries us beyond, and to the fountain of that fountain; it places us upon an eminence that overtops and overlooks the general truth in the wide survey it commands and gives to us; and as to that general truth, it enables us not only to comprehend it more perfectly, but to apply it more successfully. This is at once a branch and the great instrument of that primal philosophy of which Bacon speaks, and whose cultivation he so highly recommends—the philosophy of philosophy; the common mother of all the sciences, and by which alone their boundaries can be extended. He compares it to the Berecynthia, whom the poets of old fabled to be the mother of all the gods:

“ Omnes cœlicolas, omnes supera alta
Tenentes.”

Of such is the nature, and such will be the fruits to

mankind, of the work now proposed to be given to the world.

Further to awaken our sensibility on this subject, I need not remind the Senate how much we owe to a name that is to render the name of this country respectable in every other on this globe; the *clarum et venerabile nomen*. Nations have lived upon the earth who have become extinct, and been lost to the memory of mankind; but never when the *clarum et venerabile nomen* had illustrated their annals. The *clarum et venerabile nomen* is the true elixir of national immortality. What has this country! what can she ever have, that would be an equivalent to her in exchange for the name of her Washington! that star of stars in the diadems that sparkle on the brow of nations! Not the diadem that sparkles on the brow of Greece; not the diadem that sparkles on the brow of Rome, has one of equal brilliancy. No: it stands peerless on the earth, and alone in glory. Though it can never be a contest whose name is to do the most honor to our country, and, more than all others, to carry her name associated with his, and emblazoned by his, down through all the endless generations of mankind to follow, for all the endless ages of time to come, yet among the names to cluster around his, and to form the constellation (may it multiply to a galaxy) of American worthies, not one will ever shine with a purer, with a brighter, or more inextinguishable lustre than that of Madison.

If, then, this appropriation was merely to express a nation's gratitude to a nation's benefactor, it would be the least it would become her to make. But, besides that, we are to consider that it is to purchase for this country, and for mankind, a treasure of instruction, whose value no money can measure, no figures can express.

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